

November 23, 2020

Dear Co-Chair Shor Salkas, Co-Chair Hunta Williams, and the Transgender Equity Council,

We thank you for recently sharing feedback with us about our presentation to the Transgender Equity Council, and for doing so from a place of mutual understanding, respect, and reconciliation. Likewise, this reply is coming from the same place. We also thank you for your willingness to engage us to help foster understanding of the tragic history of violence against the transgender community.

First and foremost, we want to acknowledge and apologize for the harm that was caused by our presentation and attendance at the TEC meeting. We recognize that our presentation contributed to a notion that violence against the transgender community is not a priority. We recognize this had an impact on the committee as a whole and may have caused individuals attending the meeting to feel unsafe and for that we are sorry.

Motivated by the experience and your subsequent feedback, here are a few considerations our staff have discussed for presentations to groups going forward:

- Working carefully and thoughtfully to ensure that written and verbal language is appropriate, sensitive, and inclusive.
- Offering a content warning prior to presenting, recognizing that information about violence prevention can be upsetting and triggering.
- Working with meeting hosts to honestly and transparently clarify expectations, gather information about what's desired, and describe what we're realistically capable of providing. We want to do this in order to be more aware of each presentation's unique audience, to identify ways that we can provide meaningful information, and to ensure we are cognizant of the audience's perspectives and experiences. We regret not working with the TEC co-chairs prior to the presentation to discuss what would have been appropriate for the meeting so that we could have tailored the content for the committee. We are hopeful that with more transparent communication ahead of time in similar situations moving forward, we can begin to make important change in this way.

The Office of Violence Prevention uses a community-focused, public health approach to help ensure that everyone can be free from violence. We recognize that violence takes many forms and we are concerned about each of those forms of violence. We also recognize that multiple forms of violence are often inextricably linked together and that violence prevention efforts can be most effective when addressing the risk and protective factors that are shared between multiple forms of violence. And, we recognize that the burden of violence is not equally distributed, and that some communities face a disproportionate burden in terms of exposure to risk factors, lack of access to protective factors, and victimization.

But, though we are committed to that understanding, we are at the same time limited in our approach by a few factors, including funding, direction, and capacity. Our areas of programmatic focus are largely driven by the funding we get. In turn, much of our funding is driven by the direction we get from policymakers. In addition to funding, our policymakers also set direction and focus for us in a number of other powerful ways. Any narrowing of focus that is driven by those factors is further impacted by the fact we are a small staff (six people) focused on a very large issue (violence prevention Citywide), which limits our available scope.

Based on those factors, right now our work is predominantly focused on the issues of youth violence, gang/group violence, and gun violence. We also have some grant funds that support some work around teen dating violence, and we have a small amount of funding to support development of an intimate partner violence intervention initiative.

So, that means that right now our efforts to prevent violence against the transgender community are mostly limited to when that violence crosses over with our other initiatives. That's not because we believe violence against the transgender community—or violence against other communities or other forms of violence—is unimportant. Rather, it's a result of the practical reality of not having the time, financial resources, and general capacity to address everything and the need to follow the funding and the direction we do get.

All that being said, we don't want to become complacent in our attitudes. We do acknowledge violence impacting the transgender community is a public health problem and that there are, even as we're currently structured, opportunities for our office to advocate to do more work to prevent violence that impacts the transgender community and people who identify as non-binary. We acknowledge that programming around violence against people who are transgender and non-binary, especially people of color who are transgender, is missing from our current focus. With that in mind, we also feel there is valuable potential for change, both directly within our existing efforts and more broadly within the framework of the City's efforts around [transforming community safety](#).

In terms of our existing efforts, we would like to better and more closely work with the transgender community to identify opportunities to provide resources for community-driven strategies to address violence-related issues that are important to the transgender community. Specifically, we currently have two sources of funding that we use to partner with community-based agencies: our Violence Prevention Fund and our Blueprint Approved Institute (BPAI). The OVP fund is intended to invest in community-led strategies that address violence in Minneapolis. Some OVP Fund projects focus on violence prevention in specific communities. BPAI is a capacity building initiative aimed at strengthening community-based agencies' ability to deliver effective and community-driven violence prevention work. This is achieved through trainings, demonstration project funding, hands-on technical support, and establishment of a peer network.

We would appreciate working with the TEC to help us identify agencies and individuals working on violence prevention in the transgender community who may benefit from additional resources and support through these opportunities. In addition to providing an opportunity to support ongoing community efforts, that would also provide us an opportunity to expand our network of violence prevention community partners to include more individuals and agencies who are working on the issue of violence in the transgender community. Longer term, we are hopeful that in the future we will be able to find additional opportunities to continue to partner with the TEC to identify new ways to address the public health emergency of transgender violence as well.

We appreciate your commitment to ensuring this issue stays at the forefront, and we are grateful for an opportunity to move forward in a process of healing. We look forward to continuing to find better ways to collaborate on working toward creating a safer community for everyone in Minneapolis, and we would be happy to engage in further conversations about this going forward.

Sincerely,

Sasha Cotton

Director, Office of Violence Prevention